

Prevent Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Unlike other vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles and rubella, pertussis is still common in the United States. In 2008, as of November 29th, 100 cases of pertussis have been reported in Indiana. At the same time in 2007, Indiana had reported 53 cases. In other recent years, Indiana had reported more than 200 cases during the same week. Over 7,900 cases have been reported nationwide this year.

Pertussis is a highly contagious cough illness that often begins with cold-like symptoms and a mild, occasional cough. The cough gradually worsens over a week or two. Coughing fits, vomiting following coughing, and difficulty catching one's breath after coughing (resulting in a "whoop" sound) may occur. This severe coughing stage can last several weeks until the cough starts to slowly improve. In adolescents and adults, the illness can be mild and may not result in a long, severe coughing stage, but in infants, severe complications like pneumonia and, sometimes, death can occur.

There are important steps you can take to prevent pertussis:

1. Make sure that you and your family members are up-to-date on immunizations.

Children should receive five doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTaP) vaccination before the 7th birthday. Adolescents and adults ages 10 through 64 years should receive a one-time pertussis booster vaccine called Tdap. Tdap also protects against tetanus and diphtheria and should be used instead of a tetanus booster vaccination. It is especially important that anyone having contact with infants be up-to-date on their vaccinations.

2. Practice proper hygiene and teach children to do the same. Cough into your sleeve or into a tissue. Wash your hands after you cough or sneeze. Avoid sharing drinks or other items that come into contact with saliva or mucus.

3. Stay home if you are sick. Pertussis is spread easily when infected people go to work or school. It is important that you contact your health care provider if you or your child develops symptoms of pertussis. If your healthcare provider suspects pertussis, he or she may test you for pertussis and prescribe antibiotics. If pertussis is suspected, it is important that you stay home from work or school until you have finished five days of taking antibiotics.

For more information about pertussis, visit the Indiana State Department of Health's Quick Facts about Pertussis at <http://www.in.gov/isdh/22191.htm>.

For more information about pertussis vaccine and other routine vaccinations, visit the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) Parent's Guide to Childhood Immunization at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/parents-guide/downloads/2008-parents-guide.pdf>.

For more information about immunization schedules for children, adolescents, and adults, visit the CDC's Immunization Schedules page at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/default.htm>.